

MEDICARE REMARKS 5/9/95

The Medicare program is one of the proudest achievements of the Democratic party. It has been a true success story, and it has enjoyed bipartisan support over the 30 years since it was established.

We have made many adjustments to it over the years to respond to a changing health care system and problems of continuing increases in health care costs. But the essence of the program has remained intact.

And there can be no doubt of what an important program it has been. Can any of us imagine how people over 65 would pay for their health care if Medicare was not there? Can any of us imagine the fear and insecurity people trying to live on a fixed income would face? Can we imagine what it would be like for the average American family struggling to meet the health care bills of their parents without Medicare?

Never until today have we seen changes proposed which threatened to undermine this program. But today, these Republican budget plans to reduce Medicare payments by a quarter of a trillion dollars over the next seven years in order to pay for a tax cut will not only damage Medicare as we know it, but seriously undermine the strength of the health care system as a whole.

We cannot turn Medicare over to the insurance companies. We cannot turn the security of Medicare coverage into the insecurity of a voucher to buy private insurance. We cannot punish people by making them pay more if they want to exercise their basic right to choose their own doctor.

If the Republican party wants a fight, then they will have it. Because we cannot, we will not, let Medicare become the pawn in their game of tax reduction.